

Summary of Remarks
at the
National Fire Protection Research Foundation (NFPRF)
Fire Risk and Hazard Symposium

San Francisco, CA
June 25, 1997

What Does It Take To Make Good Things Happen?

Jack E. Snell
Building and Fire Research Laboratory
National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)

Here we--an assembly of fire researchers and users of fire research--are all fresh and ready to go and the keynote speaker raises the question, "what does it take to make good things happen?" The program is full of interesting papers, many of which report new work, why then this question? That is not the issue, the issue is not for us to appreciate what we have done and are currently doing. The "good thing" I would like to see happen is sufficient support for fire research and whatever else is necessary to achieve cost-effective fire safety, and do so within the next decade. My concern is with getting the communities we serve to better understand the value to them of what we do. What I wish to focus upon is what can we do to help make this "good thing" happen.

In this context, that is from the viewpoint of the beneficiaries of our work, "fire risk and hazard assessment" and even "performance-based codes and standards" are at best a means to their ends and it is in focussing on the ends that we are best able to get the right/best means of achieving them. And that, we have not yet done.

This is a Symposium of research application, yet the focus is primarily on the tools and not the needs to which the tools are to be applied. Therefore, let us step back and take a closer look at the needs. Only then are we likely to be assured we are doing the right research, developing the right tools, making the best applications of them, and guiding policy makers to cost-effective fire safety.

Consider the following:

- Earlier this year, a representative of the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) testified at the United States Fire Administration's (USFA) authorization hearings that NIST fire research is not responsive to the needs and concerns of the fire

Presented at the National Fire Protection Research Foundation's Second Fire Risk and Hazard Assessment Research Application Symposium, 25-27 June 1997, San Francisco, CA. 1997.